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ABSTRACT

Educators from 41 high schools and middle schools in south-central West Virginia were surveyed regarding their use of curriculum modifications for inclusion of students with mild disabilities. Educators were asked to identify modifications that they use, do not use, or would consider using. Findings indicate that respondents were employing only 6 of the 22 curriculum modifications listed on the survey. However, respondents indicated a strong willingness to consider usage of adaptations they were not currently utilizing. Most frequently used modifications were allowing students extra time to complete assignments, placing students in cooperative groups to complete assignments, and pairing low-ability students with peer tutors. Least-used modifications included changing the readability levels of textbooks and materials, and allowing students to use various forms of technology as a compensatory strategy. The high response to the "would consider" column indicates that educators are interested in curriculum modifications for the mildly handicapped, but have not implemented them, perhaps because of a lack of training in these interventions. Includes survey items and response percentages. (TD)

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BRIDGING THE GAP: CURRICULAR ADAPTATIONS RURAL REGULAR EDUCATORS ARE USING FOR INCLUSION

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Educational reform discussions, the IDEA, and the national Goals 2000 initiative have provided impetus for the widespread implementation of inclusionary programs. A basic assumption underlying inclusion is the belief accommodations and supports must be provided as appropriate to each child's unique needs.

Curriculum adaptation of the general education curriculum for students with mild disabilities, then, is an ongoing challenge confronting regular educators. In the state of West Virginia in an attempt to respond to more progressive reform movements, each school's Faculty Senate for the 1994-95 school year developed a plan for the successful implementation of inclusion. If indeed these plans have been developed, how willing are rural regular educators to accommodate the needs of children with mild disabilities? What accommodations are they currently using or not using?

Willingness to make curricular adaptations reflects a belief in the unique needs of students with mild disabilities. In schools where the educational philosophy emphasizes the success of all students, both regular and special education teachers implement a wide variety of curriculum adaptations which support the success of each learner.

This study investigated middle school and high school regular educators' usage of curricular adaptations for inclusion of students with mild disabilities. Educators were surveyed in response to statements of curricular adaptations, identifying those which they use, do not use, or would consider using.

Method

Subjects

Subjects selected for this study were intact faculties randomly selected from 13 senior high schools and 23 middle schools in south central West

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Virginia. Of the 200 teachers surveyed, 41 responded for a return rate of 21%.

Instrumentation

A survey questionnaire, adapted from the Alternative Designs of Instruction and Evaluation (McKenzie & Houk, 1993) was utilized in this study. Subjects responded to 22 statements relative to curriculum modifications, identifying those which they use, do not use, or would consider using.

Procedure

Middle school and high school regular educators were contacted by mail and asked to respond to a survey of their usage of curricular modifications for inclusion of students with mild disabilities. Educators identified curricular adaptations which they use, do not use, or would consider using. If participants agreed, they were to return the survey in an enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Results

Findings from the investigation are summarized in Table 1. Data indicated respondents typically were not employing curriculum modifications listed on the survey. Of the 22 modifications, only 6 were routinely being used by regular educators in their classrooms. However on a more positive note, respondents indicated a strong willingness to consider usage of adaptations they were not currently utilizing.

Discussion

The current study investigated curriculum modifications regular educators are utilizing for students with mild disabilities. What accommodations were they using or not using? Not surprisingly, the modification with the strongest usage, was to allow students extra time to complete assignments. This parallels the overwhelming misconception by regular educators that children with mild disabilities can complete assignments if they are only given enough time. The implication may be regular educators see a lack of need to actually differentiate curriculum to meet the unique individual needs of students with mild disabilities.

Other modifications showing high usage relate to cooperative learning,

and peer tutoring. Both of these modifications are commonly used with regular education students. Perhaps, these teachers may have received training in these interventions and feel comfortable utilizing them.

Conversely modifications least used included changing the readability levels of textbooks and materials and allowing students to use various forms of technology as a compensatory strategy. Could it be teachers have not received training, or do they just not see them as applicable to their teaching situations?

Given the high number of responses in the would consider column, it would seem regular educators are interested in curriculum modifications for the mildly handicapped, but for whatever reason the modifications have not been implemented. Could it be these teachers were not aware of these options? Or perhaps these teachers have not been afforded the appropriate training which would give them the knowledge these options might be effective?

Effective inclusion relies upon communication between regular and special education teachers. In order to fully implement inclusive programs, classrooms where regular educators are making appropriate adaptations for students with mild disabilities must be identified. Regular education cannot become a "dumping ground" where students are thrown without support for them or their teachers. The results of this study in rural West Virginia shed light on this process and ultimately facilitate greater understanding and communication between regular and special education teachers.

Table 1

Curriculum Modifications of Reg. Ed.

Middle School & High School Teachers (N = 41)

Curriculum Modifications	use %	do not use %	would consider %	does not apply %
1. Provide supplementary content written to a lower readability level than the textbook.	24	69	37	7
2. Provide alternative textbooks written to a lower readability level.	10	73	37	17
3. Provide outlines of textbook chapters.	29	56	27	15
4. Provide outlines of lecture presentations.	37	46	24	17
5. Preview questions/guides for upcoming class discussions.	56	27	17	17
6. Tape-record content from text(s).	20	70	29	10
7. Provide handouts of transparency overlays.	44	41	22	15
8. Allow students to tape-record class lectures and/or discussions.	27	63	44	10
9. Permit students to independently view films, listen to tapes, etc. outside of class.	41	52	32	7
10. Highlight the most essential information on handout material.	68	32	17	–
11. Pair low-ability students with peer tutors for study, review, and/or test preparation.	88	12	12	–
12. Allow the student extra time to complete assignments.	95	5	10	–

Table 1 (Continued)

Curriculum Modifications of Reg. Ed.

Middle School & High School Teachers (N = 41)

13. Administer "practice" tests at the beginning of a semester or new unit.	49	44	22	7
14. Make out-of-use tests available as study guides.	39	56	29	5
15. Use alternative tests with simplified readability for poor readers.	27	71	37	2
16. Allow students with disabilities to tape-record answers to essay questions.	10	63	44	27
17. Use tape-recorded tests with poor readers.	10	75	44	15
18. Administer untimed tests outside of class for poor readers/writers.	44	51	34	5
19. Provide alternative homework assignments for poor readers/writers.	51	39	20	10
20. During the lesson, allow students with disabilities to work on other assignments.	27	58	12	5
21. Select fewer concepts for the student to learn, but leave the assignment the same for other students.	49	44	7	7
22. Place the students in cooperative groups to complete assignments.	85	13	7	2

Note. Adapted from "Across the Great Divide," by R. G. McKenzie & C. S. Houk, 1993, Teaching Exceptional Children, 25, p. 18.

Reference

McKenzie, R. G. & Houk, C. S. (1993). Across the great divide. Teaching Exceptional Children, 25, 16-20.